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CONCORD, N.H.
MONITOR & N.H.
PATRIOT

E. 12,228

APR 26 1961

STILL LEARNING THE HARD WAY

The Cuban "invasion" fiasco has developed information which indicates (1) the Central Intelligence Agency was involved in operational plans for the unsuccessful landing, and (2) the Castro forces had counter spies among the Cuban anti-Castro elements with whom CIA was dealing.

This raises a question as to exactly what are the functions of the CIA. Is it supposed to be the official spying agency of the United States government in international affairs and nothing more, or is it an arm of the government which develops policy independently, or implements policy determined elsewhere in the government?

At the moment the seeking of answers to these basic questions seems to be secondary to an attempt to discover why the Cuban government was apparently better informed than was the American government as to "invasion" prospects. In short, was the CIA intelligence appraisal deficient to the point of misleading the administration in making the decision to permit and assist the "invasion" attempt. Apparently it was.

For some months now the United States has had no diplomats in Cuba. Until a few years ago such intelligence as the government had on developments elsewhere came mainly through diplomatic channels, a combination of Embassy political reporting, reporting by armed services attaches in our Embassies, and such information as the diplomats of other nations might exchange with us, rather than through CIA, which is still a young agency.

In the current situation we were

particularly dependent on CIA. The Swiss, who now represent us in Cuba, may or may not be of much real help, and relying upon diplomats of even the most friendly nations is at best a precarious occupation. Chances are that when our Embassy was closed in Havana and its personnel brought home the principal source of reliable information on Cuba was gone.

The President is trying to find out just where the fault lies for the abortive "invasion." This is a highly desirable exercise which could in the end pay the United States dividends through clarification of what functions each of the several agencies involved should have and how well they are exercising them. The division of responsibilities needs to be kept clear but that can only occur if somebody works at it, and apparently the President himself is going to attempt to achieve this end.

When all is said and done, however, it is the final estimate of the relative weights to be given a wide range of intelligence which is most important and experience is the best teacher of sound evaluation. Unfortunately experience is often a hard teacher, as it has proved to be in the Cuban situation.